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## Perceptions and experiences of coping with breast cancer related lymphedema among breast cancer survivors at a tertiary comprehensive cancer care centre in India

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**Background & Aim:** Breast cancer related lymphedema (BCRL) is a chronic sequel affecting the psychosocial aspects of life in breast cancer survivors. Self-management in breast cancer requires active participation by the survivor in recuperation and rehabilitation, thus minimising treatment consequences and promoting health and well-being. Although awareness of BCRL is constantly monitored for prospective exercise program planning, in depth exploration of survivors' perceptions, experiences and coping strategies is scarcely reported from low resource settings. We aimed to explore the perceptions, experiences and coping strategies of breast cancer survivors diagnosed with BCRL.

**Materials and methods:** Approval from the institutional research committee was sought. Study procedure was explained and informed consent was obtained from all eligible participants. Focus group discussions using a validated interview guide with ten open ended questions related to perceptions, experiences and coping strategies using contextual factors (sociocultural, financial, BCRL coping strategies related barriers and facilitators) were implemented. Data was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and footnotes were collected to prepare the transcript. Identifiable information was omitted for confidentiality. Each investigator was given a copy of the transcript for analysis. Inductive thematic analysis was performed to generate themes, subthemes through relevant coding.

**Results:** Seven female breast cancer survivors [55 (4) years] were interviewed. Six essential themes were identified (symptoms/triggers of BCRL, effects on daily routines, self-care and monitoring, treatment perceptions, misconceptions and sociocultural stigmas, need for exercise-based education and awareness on BCRL). Three survivors perceived the need of regular self-care, monitoring instructions to be provided during rehabilitation, five survivors identified social factors that led to activity participation restriction. Most participants identified a need for regular tailored exercise programs specific to BCRL.

**Conclusion:** BCRL encompasses a multitude of survivor perceived experiences that need to be addressed, considered and emphasised when planning a precision-based exercise program for breast cancer in low resource setting.

### Keywords

breast cancer, lymphedema, survivors, perceptions

### Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

### Abstract submitters declaration

yes

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